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THESIS

**THE IMPACT OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY ON THE
STRUCTURE OF IRAN'S GOVERNMENT**

by

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December 2003

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GOVERNMENT**

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ABSTRACT

The potential for reform in the Iranian government appears to be very high, but the aggressive foreign policy position taken by the United States is actually helping the *mullahs* retain power. The United States has had an anti-Iranian foreign policy since 53 hostages were held by Iranian students for 444 days from 1979-1981. The election of Mohammed Khatami as President has signaled that the Iranian people desire a change in how their government operates; however, the office of the President does not have any significant power in Iran because the constitution makes that position subordinate to the unelected position of the Supreme Leader. According to Jack Snyder, liberal regimes, like Khatami's presidency, lose domestic political strength when their country is under international pressure to change. Since the United States is the sole source of international pressure against Iran's government, then United States that can help guide Iran's future. Relaxing the unilateral economic sanctions is one of many actions that start the process of reform in Iran.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND ITS IMPACT ON IRAN'S GOVERNMENT

The United States has used foreign policy to apply international pressure on Iran's government, which has been a motive force behind domestic political change in Iran. This thesis will explore the historical record of U.S. – Iranian relations over the later half of the 20th century to demonstrate that the United States has influenced domestic changes in Iran. Then, I will analyze the political reactions to recent U.S. foreign policy actions and the strengths and weaknesses of each major faction in Iran's government – the reformers versus the status quo *mullahs* – looking for potential international pressure points the United States can use to change Iran's domestic political system. Based on these findings, I will make recommendations for a foreign policy strategy for dealing with Iran.

The theoretical basis for this argument comes from an article by Jack Snyder on how U.S. foreign policy was a causal mechanism for the regime change and subsequent collapse of communism in the Soviet Union. "The history of the past century demonstrates that international circumstances have often exerted a powerful influence on the domestic political coalitions and institutions of the great powers."¹ While Iran is not classified as a great power by the world's standards, the argument is no less valid for a regional power. Snyder establishes a framework for understanding how international pressure can shape different types of regimes. "[A] regime with a liberal orientation (is) an electoral democracy with a foreign policy oriented toward mutually beneficial trade ... a regime with an imperial orientation (is) an elite coalition formed by groups with protectionist interests."² Iran's government has two classifications; the reformers, who dominate the elected offices of Iran's government, would fall into the liberal regime category, and the *mullahs* would fall into the imperial regime category. This classification is important for understanding potential outcomes in domestic politics when external stresses are applied. According to Snyder, "states whose liberal orientation in domestic and foreign affairs is weakly institutionalized, a highly threatening international

¹ Jack Snyder, "International Leverage on Soviet Domestic Change," *World Politics* (Oct 1989): 4.

² Ibid, p. 4

environment will turn the state's domestic structure and its foreign policies in an imperial direction. Conversely, international environments favorable to cooperation will help to institutionalize a liberal orientation more deeply.”³ The United States has had an aggressive and antagonistic foreign policy when dealing with Iran, particularly over the past decade, which may explain why Khatami's optimistic plans for domestic reform have yet to materialize. “Strongly institutionalized regimes ... will be less easily diverted from their existing orientation, except by major domestic or international failures.”⁴ The *mullah's* domestic political power is strongly institutionalized which makes them difficult to remove from power; however, as the Iranian economy continues to struggle and Iranian people continue to be brutally oppressed by the regime, the likelihood of major failures increases.

The foreign policy of the United States has been staunchly anti-Iranian since the Islamic Revolution. While this policy may have had pragmatic reasons for being implemented in the 1980's and early 1990's, the domestic politics of Iran have shifted. There is an internal movement of political figures that are calling for reform in Iran's government. These reformers have been able to capture the majority of the elected offices available in Iran's government, which demonstrates a general desire among the voting public for reform and change. The aggressive foreign policy of the United States is working to strengthen the imperial regime of the mullahs and weaken the liberal regime of the reformers. This can be seen in reactions to recent U.S. foreign policy actions published in Iranian newspapers.

Three case studies will be analyzed to establish the U.S. – Iranian historical record of political interaction that has caused domestic changes in Iran's government. The most overt case of U.S. engagement in Iranian domestic politics is the 1953 coup of the populist Iranian leader Mohammad Mossadegh. He was seen as a potential ally to the Soviet Union which, to the United States, made Iran vulnerable to Communist expansion in the early stages of the Cold War. The second case study examines the white revolution where the Shah implemented a series of internal domestic economic reforms designed to silence his domestic political critics. The most significant result from the white

³ Ibid, p. 5

⁴ Ibid, p. 5

revolution was the emergence of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as a national figure in Iran. The third case, the Islamic Revolution, shows how American imperialism, real or implied by anti-Shah forces, helped bring about the most radical political change in the Middle East in the 20th century when a well entrenched monarchy was displaced by a poorly armed, but highly motivated group of clerics and their followers.

The strength of the reform movement is centered on the legitimacy of its argument as presented to the Iranian people. The only legitimate form of government is the one supported and controlled by the people it is set up to govern. The current government uses the constitution as a shield to prevent the political reform being demanded by the Iranian people. Three significant figures will be the focus of this discussion: Abdolkarim Soroush (a prominent Iranian political professor), President Mohammad Seyyed Khatami and Reza Pahlavi (the Shah's son). Soroush's argument boils down to the necessity that an Islamic government must follow democratic principles of governance. He directly challenges the claims by the *mullahs* that their understanding and interpretation of Islam is the only true interpretation. Soroush argues that religious knowledge is only a subset of human knowledge, and human knowledge is fallible because humans are imperfect. Therefore the only way to find the truth is to continually search for it through debate and discussion among those educated in religious studies. President Khatami takes a more pragmatic approach in that he agrees with Soroush in principle, but he challenges the *mullahs* to open the Iranian society in order to permit the kind of debate Soroush promotes. Khatami also argues that the flat rejection of any political systems developed in the West is foolish; the West found success when they adopted the scientific and philosophical principles developed in the Middle East centuries ago, why couldn't Iran reintroduce those principles to Iran with some of the modifications developed by the West? The third political figure, Reza Pahlavi argues that the Iranian government, as it stands today, will collapse under its own weight in much the same way as the Soviet Union did in the early 1990's. Pahlavi challenges the *mullahs* to simply either become part of the solution or remain the problem. In the second case Pahlavi sees clerical influence in Iranian politics being almost completely removed, which is not a direction he thinks would be good for Iran in the long run.

The *mullahs* have resisted reforms and changes that would weaken their hold on political power in Iran because they control the significant levers of power available for state control. Structurally, Iran's Constitution places the appointed Supreme Leader, *faqih*, above the popularly elected President. This sets up a power struggle between these offices before the positions are filled because there can only be one leader of any organization, whether it is a government, a company or a military unit. The *faqih's* duties and responsibilities include appointment of the head of the Judiciary, appointment of half of the members of the Guardian Council, commander in chief of the military and appointment of the head of radio and television. The remaining members of the Guardian Council are selected from a list of candidates provided by the *faqih* to the *Majlis*, parliament. The Guardian Council is an oversight group that reviews all legislation passed by the *Majlis* for compatibility with Islamic principles. These powers alone make it seem impossible for reform to occur because one man controls legislation, judicial rulings, the military and security services, and the media. With all of the power, the leader still cannot control how the Iranian people vote for their elected officials. Election results are perhaps the best indication of the *mullah's* popularity in Iran. Power doesn't translate to popularity since 70% or more of voting Iranians selected a Presidential candidate that is opposed to the way the clerics rule Iran. Lower elections at the Parliamentary and local levels have also heavily favored reform candidates. Despite this apparent groundswell of support for reform and change in domestic Iranian politics the *mullahs* haven't had to yield any significant portions of their power to reformers because of the structure of the system.

B. CURRENT FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD IRAN

The United States maintains the Clinton Era containment policy. The Bush Administration supports the Iran-Libya Sanctions Act (ILSA) and the executive orders forbidding American companies to conduct business in Iran. "The Iran and Libya Sanctions Act was enacted in 1996. It sanctions foreign companies that provide new investments of over \$40 million for the development of petroleum resources."⁵ The intent is easily understood; scare foreign companies into avoiding investment in Iran, therefore preventing economic growth in Iran. President Bush claimed "we continue to have

⁵ U.S. State Department, *Bush Signs Extension of Iran and Libya Sanctions Act*, (August 3, 2001).

serious concerns over its (Iran's) support for terrorism, opposition to the Middle East peace process, and pursuit of weapons of mass destruction,"⁶ as justification to continue enforcing ILSA. "President (Clinton) declared a national emergency with respect to Iran ... to deal with the threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States [constituted] by the actions and policies of the Government of Iran."⁷ A national emergency translates into using any and all means available protect the United States from Iran. The choice selected by Clinton and extended by Bush has been unilateral economic sanctions "Because the actions and policies of the Government of Iran continue to threaten ... the United States, the national emergency declared on March 15, 1995, must continue in effect beyond ... 2001. Therefore ... I am continuing the national emergency with respect to Iran."⁸ U.S. companies are forbidden to conduct any level of import/export deals with Iran by these two policies in conjunction with U.S. export law. The effects of this combined policy would be significant if they were supported by the United Nations or even a coalition of willing countries.

The only reaction generated in Iran is that the United States is using its imperial power to pick on a weaker country. Meanwhile, the rest of the world is conducting trade and establishing a diplomatic relationship with the largest country in the region. There are major companies outside the United States that don't conduct business in the United States. "Elf Aquitaine has opened an office in Tehran and is due to cooperate with Iran in the development of the Doroud onshore oil field ... The investment on this project has been estimated at 3.2 billion French francs."⁹ In January 1998 the conversion rate for the French franc was 16.5 cent per franc, which makes this oil deal worth over \$500 million. This is a clear violation of ILSA, but the U.S. government has taken no action against Elf. "The British Petroleum Company (BP) has decided to reenter Iran, following an absence of 20 years ... BP's recent announcement to open a representative office in Tehran came while other international oil companies were expressing a desire to invest in the Islamic

⁶ Ibid. Quote is from a statement released by President Bush.

⁷ U.S. State Department, *Bush Certifies That Iran Continues to Pose Threat*, (March 13, 2001). Executive Orders 12957, 19959 and 13059 were issued by President Clinton.

⁸ U.S. State Department, *Bush Certifies That Iran Continues to Pose Threat*, (March 13, 2001).

⁹ "US 'Becoming Isolated' By Anti-Iran Policy," *Tehran Iran News*, (January 15, 1998).

Republic of Iran, claiming that US sanction policies against Iran were crumbling.”¹⁰ Even the United States’ closest ally is conducting business with Iran. BP is a significant company in the U.S. oil industry, but no sanctions have been levied. “Iran’s Deputy Oil Minister Hossein Kazempour-Ardebili confirmed that talks over the project were being held ‘on the modalities of cooperation,’ Iranian state television reported. Under the agreement Japan’s government and a private consortium will develop the Azadegan oil field.”¹¹ One of the United States’ largest trading partners is even conducting oil business with Iran. Three countries have concluded oil deals with Iran since ILSA was passed. Japan and Europe are continuing to trade with and invest in Iran while the United States stands on the sidelines complaining about support for terrorist organizations. The sanctions are a major point of contention with Iranian politicians and they have failed to cause any change in Iran’s regime.

Chapter II will analyze Iranian reactions to U.S. foreign policy over several time periods of the late 20th century. The United States didn’t become significantly involved in the Middle East until after World War II. Therefore there are three significant points of interest of interest: the CIA led coup against Mossadegh in 1953 to reinstall Mohammad Reza Shah, the White Revolution which brought Ruhollah Khomeini into the Iranian national spotlight, and the Islamic Revolution where Khomeini took power from the Shah. This will set the framework for viewing Iranian reactions to different U.S. foreign policies as the basis for analyzing current and future policies.

Chapter III will focus on the elected side of the Iranian government; since the elected side is dominated by those associated with the reform movement the discussion will be driven by reformist positions and statements. A discussion of the reform movement’s strength and weaknesses in domestic political terms will identify possible pressure points that can be acted on by U.S. policy makers. Khatami’s election is significant because of the contentious position he took during his 1997 election campaign toward the *mullah’s* unchecked power appeared to be the source of his strength. However, Khatami has been unable to breakthrough the *mullah’s* bureaucracy to achieve

¹⁰ Mehryar Emami, “The Crumbling of US Economic Sanctions,” *Tehran Iran News* (May 17, 1998).

¹¹ “Iranian President Khatami on Historic Visit to Japan, US-Iranian Ties,” *Hong Kong AFP*, (October 31, 2000).

his goals. An analysis of Khatami's reactions to U.S. foreign policy should reveal how U.S. policy makers could design changes that would improve Khatami's chances to achieve some measure of reform.

Chapter IV will be similar in structure to chapter III but will focus on the religious side of the government. The *mullahs* have manipulated the Republic's Constitution in order to ensure their hold on power regardless of public opinion. Actions along these lines have been simultaneously strengths and weaknesses because their corrupt actions have made them stronger under constitutional provisions while also alienating the majority of Iran's population. Another analysis of the same U.S. foreign policy decisions from chapter III will provide the half of the policy story we are trying to create.

The Conclusion will tie together the reactions by the elected and religious sides of the government and the historical reactions by Iran to form a framework for establishing future U.S. foreign policy decisions. The pattern of bad foreign policy decisions will be used as a guide for what not to do in the future when defining U.S. foreign policy as it pertains to Iran. After outlining changes to the U.S. foreign policy with Iran, we will use this newly established framework for evaluation and understanding of possible implications.

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II. THE HISTORY OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY AND IRAN'S GOVERNMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The United States has been interested in Iranian politics since Mohammed Reza Shah was put in power by the British in place of his father Reza Shah. The ties that developed over the years between the Shah and various U.S. presidents gave the appearance that this relationship would only continue to strengthen. However, three events altered this perception of permanence; a temporary reign by the socialist Mohammed Mossadegh, the Shah's White Revolution and the Islamic Revolution led by Ruhollah Khomeini. This chapter will analyze how U.S. foreign policy not only changed with evolving situations in Iran, but actually was part of the causal mechanism that sparked these changes in the Iranian government. It will also develop a framework for understanding and analyzing current and future U.S. foreign policies toward Iran.

U.S. foreign policy was only one of several factors that drove the changes in Iran's government. The Shi'a Islamic traditions regarding leadership, oppression of the people and mismanagement of the economy were contributing factors, but were beyond the control of the United States. These contributing factors should be understood for a more complete understanding of the causes of the revolution, but are not necessary in the development of a framework. Considering that the United States has employed political, economic and military actions in the execution of its foreign policy toward Iran we can examine the reaction of the government through speeches and statements and the reaction of the people through their protests and business deals for a historical understanding of Iranian response to U.S. foreign policy.

The Islamic Revolution appears to have been set in motion at the beginning of the 20th century. Reza Shah's subsequent forced abdication in favor of his son in 1941 further upset a politically active Mohammad Mossadegh. Mossadegh seized power from the Shah in 1951 after being elected the Prime Minister of the *Majles*. Then in 1953 British and U.S. secret agents coordinated two coups, the first being unsuccessful, to remove Mossadegh and return the Shah to power. The White Revolution brought

Ruhollah Khomeini to the Iranian national spotlight and gave him the necessary recognition for him to be able to implement his vision of Iranian government, the Islamic Republic.

B. THE RISE AND FALL OF MOSSADEGH

Mohammad Mossadegh had always been an active and prominent figure in Iranian politics. He had been pushing for the removal of foreign interference from Iran for years and his focus in 1951 became the British controlled Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. With this in mind he nationalized Iran's oil industry in order to remove one method of British influence over Iranian politics.¹² Mossadegh claimed that because the British controlled the main resource of Iran, its oil reserves, Britain was exploiting Iran for financial gain, and once the oil was gone the British would take their treasure and leave Iran with nothing but derelict oil equipment sitting on dry wells. His passionate plea for the expulsion of the British intruders implicitly meant that the Shah was a corrupt self-serving dictator allowing the British to deplete Iran of its oil while he was being paid to look the other way. Even beyond that he alleged that the British manipulated the Shah. The Shah's placid nature revealed itself again when he didn't offer any major opposition to Mossadegh becoming Prime Minister. The Tudeh party saw this as a prime opportunity to enhance its political weight by backing the rising star of Mossadegh. This uncontrollable response by the Tudeh party wound up leading to Mossadegh's removal because of the established fear of communist expansion the United States and Great Britain associated with the Tudeh party gaining power in Iran.

Even before Mossadegh and the National Front began their campaign to displace the Shah from the seat of power the United States was adjusting its foreign policy to prepare for this change. The United States remained optimistic that Mossadegh's charisma would keep him in power for a significant period of time. "As long as (Mossadegh) lives there was but little danger, but if he were to be assassinated or otherwise to disappear from power, a political vacuum would occur in Iran and the Communists might easily take over."¹³ The United States needed to have a political

¹² William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 2d ed, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 283.

¹³ National Security Council, *Memorandum: Discussion at the 135th Meeting of the National Security Council on Wednesday March 4, 1953* (March 5, 1953), 5.

figure in place that was not supported by or supportive of communist organizations such as the Tudeh party. The CIA understood the possibility of Soviet expansion into Iran and warned the U.S. government before Mossadegh became Prime Minister with the support of the Tudeh party.

The United States reaffirmed its position of preventing the expansion of communism into Iran with the understanding of the likely outcome of an uncontrolled regime change after Mossadegh described above. According to a declassified National Security Council Report dated March 14, 1951, it continued to be in the security interest of the United States that Iran not fall under communist domination.¹⁴ The United States had to closely monitor the state of affairs in Iran because of the volatility surrounding Mossadegh. The slightest move by communist groups to seize power from Mossadegh could be a precursor for a regime change to communism which was an unacceptable result for Iran in the view of U.S. policy makers. “Fearing that Mosaddiq had lost control of the situation in Iran and that the revived Tudeh would lead that country into the Soviet camp, Washington dispatched CIA agents to Tehran to assist the Iranian officers in organizing a coup against Mosaddiq.”¹⁵ The lack of stability made the United States very jumpy when communist political groups appeared to be poised to take control of Iran. Therefore the United States felt the overwhelming need to remove Mossadegh because of the support he received from communist organizations in Iran and the general instability he permitted in Iran while serving as the Prime Minister.

C. THE WHITE REVOLUTION

The White Revolution was a series of economic reforms implemented by the Shah and designed with the intent to improve the everyday lives of all Iranians. The most notable event rising from the White Revolution was the emergence of Khomeini as a nationally recognized political activist with an Islamic ideology. The Shah’s attempt at reforming the economy of Iran became a platform for opposition to the Shah’s oppressive policies. The Shah professed a desire to improve the economy in order to improve political stability in his country, but the people, guided by outspoken individuals like

¹⁴ National Security Council, *The Position of the United States with Respect to Iran*, by Lay, James, Jr, Report to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary NSC 107, (March 14, 1951), 1.

¹⁵ William L. Cleveland, *A History of the Modern Middle East*, 2d ed, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000), 284.

Khomeini, saw this as the Shah trying to expand his landholdings and wealth. The Shah had long lived with the criticism that he was an American puppet, especially after he was returned to the throne by the CIA backed coup to remove Mossadegh. “The slogan of land reform in Iran was the disguise for the total disruption of the agrarian economy in a manner designed to assure maximum profit for the royal family; a certain oligarchy tied to the royal family; and foreign agribusiness interests.”¹⁶ It seems logical then why the Shah engaged his political opposition so aggressively.

Mohammad Reza Shah obviously found a fountain of untapped strength and resolve after Mossadegh was displaced in a bloody coup sponsored by U.S. CIA agents. “After June 1963, the Shah, encouraged by the political and military defeat of his enemies ... embarked upon an unprecedented political witch hunt using his notorious security organization SAVAK to intimidate, harass, arrest without trial, and physically torture political and religious opponents of his regime.”¹⁷ His opposition claimed that his reforms were part of a master plan to encourage dissenters to revolt in order for them to expose themselves for the SAVAK to more easily round them up. Khomeini took this opportunity to engage the regime by challenging its legitimacy on a religious basis; he wasn’t consumed by the details of the White Revolution as much as the resulting unrest being a breeding ground for spreading his anti-Shah/anti-American message. “In the earliest declarations of Imam Khomeini, made in 1963 ... he concentrates ... (on) the continued violation by the Shah of the Iranian constitution and his ... oath ... to preserve and protect Islam” and “he attacks the Shah’s subordination to foreign powers, mentioning primarily the United States and ... Israel.”¹⁸ Apparently some of this had some truth because the Shah wanted to end any chance of this message becoming a battle cry for the oppressed people of Iran. To make Khomeini a martyr for the cause against the Shah would have been detrimental to the existence of the Shah’s regime in 1963. However, “The decision to deport rather than arrest Imam Khomeini and imprison him in Iran was based no doubt on the hope that in exile he would fade from popular

¹⁶ Hamid Algar, *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2001), 55.

¹⁷ M. H. Pesaran, “The System of Dependent Capitalism in Pre- and Post-Revolutionary Iran,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Volume 14, Issue 4 (November 1982): 505.

¹⁸ Hamid Algar, *Roots of the Islamic Revolution in Iran*, (Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2001), 57.

memory.”¹⁹ It also only delayed the inevitable dismissal of the Shah that occurred 16 years later.

D. THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION

The build up to the Islamic revolution occurred over the Shah’s entire reign from 1948 until he was deposed. Khomeini watched as Iran became increasingly entangled with and dependent on the United States for its economic and political security. “[H]ad it not been for the continued interference in Iranian affairs first by Russia, ... Great Britain, and ... the United States and Israel, Iran today, instead of looking back on a quarter century of struggle and a year of revolution ... might well have been able to look back on more than half a century of constitutional and parliamentary rule.”²⁰ Russia and Great Britain’s involvement in Iran, while not relevant to this thesis specifically, help one understand how Iran’s institutional fear of international involvement developed in its domestic activities. The United States didn’t do anything new or creative when establishing its relationship with the Shah; the United States merely replaced the old imperial powers.

The relationship between the Shah and the United States was one of mutual support. “Matters came to a head once more in the fall of (1964) when the Shah concluded a status of forces agreement with America that provided immunity from prosecution for all American personnel in Iran and their dependents.”²¹ These agreements have become standard operating procedure for almost every country that houses U.S. troops; however, the Iranian people saw this as preferential treatment for imperialist foreigners. From the point of view of the Iranian populace it appeared that the Shah was being manipulated by the United States solely for the purpose of protecting U.S. troops regardless of any transgressions committed against Iranians. President Carter used human rights as part of his campaign platform, “people decided that this was a useful instrument to employ against the Iranian regime.”²² While this was not the reason why Carter was elected in 1976, it certainly helped to paint a positive image of Carter for

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 59.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 25.

²¹ Ibid, p. 59.

²² Ibid, p. 120.

America's voting public. "Carter now undertook a total reversal of his policy and, far from criticizing the Shah or exercising pressure upon him to change his human rights policy, praised him in lavish terms, saying that there was complete identity of policy between the United States and Iran."²³ Carter is apparently giving the Shah his unconditional support. "[A]fter the great massacre in Tehran on 8 September, 1978, when an estimated four thousand people were killed, Carter left his humanitarian efforts on behalf of so-called peace at Camp David to send a personal message of support to the Shah."²⁴ Algar gives the impression that this attack against protestors in Iran is viewed by many Iranians as one of the great tragedies of Iranian human rights. The fact that Carter would extend a message of support after 4000 Iranians were killed by the Shah's security forces is significant evidence that the Shah had the unconditional support of the United States. The most provocative evidence Algar presents on the connection between the Shah and the United States is an anecdote related to him by an unnamed friend:

those pictures of the Shah shaking hands with every incoming president reminded him very much of the traditional political practice in Iran when the provincial governor at the accession of every new would travel to the capital city, offer some appropriate present to the king, be confirmed by him in his position, and then be sent back to the province under his control to resume plundering and looting for his own profit and that of the central government.²⁵

This memory of old traditions paints a particularly negative picture of the Shah from the perspective of Iranians. The phrase politics is perception holds true even in Iran. The Shah was perceived by many Iranians to be the servant of a U.S. imperial master.

There was not unanimous agreement in Iran's government that the United States would always be there to protect and support Iran. Diplomatic relations between Iran and the United States were not different than with any other friendly nation; the perception that the Iranian people held of the relationship seemed more significant. "Iranian officials – including the Shah – have expressed uneasiness on occasion about the reliability of the US as a supplier. Their concerns center on rapidly rising prices for military items and on

²³ Ibid, p. 121.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 122.

²⁵ Ibid, p. 121.

indications of Congressional and public opposition to large-scale arms transfers to Iran”²⁶ These expressed concerns by the Shah’s government forced American officials to reassure their friends in the Middle East of America’s commitment. “We (the United States) remain committed to our policy of working closely with the Government of Iran on security matters.”²⁷ What countries work closely with another country on domestic security issues? Great Britain does not depend on the United States for its domestic security. It may be an ally when confronting global crises like Afghanistan and Iraq, but their defense structure and development exists exclusively from U.S. defense organizations. It is statements like this that reveal the true level of involvement and control that the United States had in Iran’s government during the reign of the Shah.

Our main messages for (Shultz) to convey to the Shah would be ... We are determined to act in our interests ... But over the next several months we will seek a meeting of the minds between consumer and producer on such key issues as oil prices and OPEC investment ... We are starting our dialogue with the Shah because of our special relationship with Iran ... We are determined to do our best to help Iran meet its internal development objectives.²⁸

After reassuring the Shah that the United States will support him on security issues, the United States demands that Iran exercise its level of control over oil prices for the benefit of the United States.

It is clear that the United States had significant influence over Iran’s government, which was one of the chief complaints Khomeini lodged against the Shah. The involvement the United States had in the Mossadegh coup and the White Revolution when combined with the evidence of American influence in domestic Iranian affairs presented in this section certainly demonstrates that Khomeini’s argument was valid. The results of Khomeini’s revolution are proof that he was able to make his case to the Iranian people in 1978-79. The United States interventionist foreign policy during the 3 decades between World War II and the Islamic Revolution was at least part of the motive force that Khomeini used to change the structure of Iran’s government.

²⁶ U.S. State Department, *Military Supply: Reliability of the U.S. as a Supplier* (May 1, 1975), Briefing Memo.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Hormats, Robert and Robert B. Oakley, “Your Briefing of Shultz for his Discussion with the Shah and his Meeting with Schmidt’s ‘Private Group’,” National Security Memorandum (January 6, 1975): 1-2.

E. CONCLUSION

The West noticeably had its hands in Iranian affairs since the 19th Century with the combination of two of the great western powers, Great Britain and the United States, pulling the strings. Numerous internal U.S. documents reveal a pattern of policymaking designed to influence Iran's actions. Interference in Iranian affairs demonstrated the direct involvement by Western powers in Iran's government and created an unbreakable link between the Shah and the West in the minds of the Iranian people; a point that was repeatedly made by Khomeini. It also provides a general historic understanding of how Iranian domestic politics has been changed through American pressure.

This chapter has given an outline of U.S. policy decisions overlaid by both the reaction of Iran's people and the changes that occurred in its government. A framework for understanding the response of the Iranian people to future U.S. foreign policy decisions becomes apparent. Direct U.S. influence on the decisions made in Iran has always had a negative response. The United States cannot be drawn into the trap of telling Iranian leadership how to respond in a given situation, especially if it's a political body whose power they are trying to enhance. The United States can provide less overt support through rhetoric and public addresses by U.S. leaders. Although this is easily brushed aside and doesn't have the teeth of economic sanctions or military action it provides the Iranian leadership the opportunity to hear the United States opinions on various issues and act according to their best interests. With the United States establishing a hands-off policy with Iran attitudes and impressions of western imperialism will begin to fade from memory.

The damage to U.S.-Iranian relations that has been generated over decades cannot be dismantled inside the time span of one U.S. presidential administration. It also cannot be aided by antagonizing the Iranian people when their country is labeled as part of an "Axis of Evil." The improvement in U.S.-Iranian relations will come when the United States reaches out to show it no longer desires to provoke a negative relationship with Iran. It's up to the American political machine to change how it views Iran before Iran will change how it views America because Iran did not initiate contact, it merely responded to the United States.

III. THE REFORM MOVEMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The Iranian people are not afforded the opportunity to openly challenge the decisions made by their religiously dominated government without the fear of reprisal. The recent rise in popularity of those associated with the reform movement is in part due to those politicians saying that freedom must be expanded. President Khatami, Reza Pahlavi and Abdolkarim Soroush all see that Iran is doomed to remain stagnant and its people will continue to suffer economic hardship as long as freedom for the people of Iran does not exist. Khomeini's assertion that the Islamic Revolution was not about economics was shortsighted. People need to eat. People desire to have physical security regardless of the religious affiliation. It's hard to be dedicated to religious principles when you don't know the source of your next meal.

By analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the reformers, the claim that they are a weakly institutionalized liberal regime becomes more evident. Weak liberal regimes do not have the domestic political weight to use foreign criticism to their advantage. They must stand in line with the faction that controls their government regardless of their political differences. Also, by highlighting the strengths of the reform movement one can see that there is a desire among the majority of Iranians for democratic reform in their government.

The Reform Movement has the majority support of the Iranian people as evidenced by the election of President Khatami. It was the Iranian people who ratified the Constitution in 1979 thereby giving the Islamic Revolution legitimacy at least in the eyes of Iranians. The Reform Movement is calling for a referendum to change the structure of Iran's government, but the current structure enables the *mullahs* to prevent such a referendum from being presented to the Iranian people. If the people desire a national vote to determine the future of Iran's government, they must be given the opportunity because it is the people that bestow legitimacy on the government.

There has been a concerted effort by the reformers to begin opening diplomatic relations with the United States. The problem with this desire is two fold. The reformers

don't control Iranian foreign policy, which prevents them from taking actions that would give the United States sufficient evidence to believe Iran's government had reformed. Similarly, the United States is still very angry about the actions taken by Khomeini's government against the United States during the revolution, primarily the hostages that were held from 1979 to 1981. In these misunderstandings that exist between the United States and Iran, the United States has continued its anti-Iran policy, which weakens the domestic position of the reformers. Mardom Salari is a pro-Khatami daily publication from Tehran. When the United States takes a foreign policy position that is anti-Iranian – the Conoco oil deal in the 1990's and the Axis of Evil speech - editorials and commentaries in Mardom Salari fall in line with the position of the conservative clerics and become anti-American. Conversely, when the United States is engaging in activities that will benefit Iran – the invasion of Iraq and removal of Saddam Husayn – these same editorials become supportive of U.S. actions.

B. A GLIMMER OF HOPE

1. People Need Freedom

The Iranian people have demanded freedom of expression from its government in the past and still do today. Khomeini's Islamic Revolution was underpinned by the idea of speaking out against the oppressive regime of the Shah; however, somewhere in the routinization of the revolution this concept was lost. The only legitimate government was the one he installed and challenging that government meant one was anti-Islamic. "The cynicism and despair that afflict many of our countrymen is the main symptom of our closed and repressive environment. They have no opportunity to engage in open and public debate, analyze the nature of a variety of problems, or question the legitimacy of the clerical regime as a whole."²⁹ The interpretation of Islamic principles that formed the basis for the Islamic Republic cannot be the final understanding of Islam for the remainder of time. In order for the search for the ultimate truth to continue religious scholars must be allowed to discuss and challenge the conventional wisdom that is presented by the religious leadership. "We cannot expect any positive transformations

²⁹ Reza Pahlavi, *Winds of Change: The Future of Democracy in Iran* (Washington: Regency Publishing, 2002), 18.

anywhere unless the yearning for freedom is fulfilled.”³⁰ The *mullahs* feed on the conspiracy theorist mentality of the Middle East. The typical line is that Iran is experiencing problems because the West has agents that interfere with their plans. If Western influence were completely removed from Iran then *Allah* would bless the Iranian people with success. It is the *mullah*’s actions of trying to isolate Iran from the West that are causing Iran’s economic failure, rather than mysterious and covert Western agents. “The left’s staunch support for the populist-republican dimension of the regime and its symbols such as the constitution, their liberal attitudes in the sociocultural sphere, and their belief in more freedom of expression and individual rights in Iran are finding more voters among the general population.”³¹ The Iranian people are increasingly seeing the deception that the *mullahs* are feeding them. Iranians aren’t necessarily willing to side with the United States, but they certainly don’t like or trust the current religious regime.

The reform movement challenges the narrow-minded vision the clerics have regarding the form of an Islamic government, not the existence of it. “[T]he rejection of theocracy ... does not, in anyway, mean a rejection of Islam. Equally important, separation of religion and state does not restrict the clergy from interfacing in government affairs, but the government from interfering in religion.”³² One of the more significant aspects of the reformers argument is how Islam has become less important in the everyday lives of Iranians even though the government is dominated by clerical leadership and based on Islamic principles. The reformers want to separate religion and government not solely for the sake of the government, but to protect religion from the corrupting influence of government and politics. “The once respected and revered cleric is now the most despised individual in our society.”³³ Islam and the societal position of the clerics provided the people with a buffer between them and oppressive government actions during the reign of the Shah. With the clerics being in the role of the government, they removed that buffer and became the oppressors themselves. “The legitimacy of

³⁰ Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Liberty and Development*, (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1998), 4.

³¹ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 127.

³² Reza Pahlavi, *Winds of Change: The Future of Democracy in Iran* (Washington: Regency Publishing, 2002), 28-9.

³³ Ibid, p. 37.

concepts such as collective decision making, reconciliation, and the supremacy of the public interest was upheld by the behavior of the prophet himself and to some extent by the Caliphs who succeeded him, especially Imam Ali.”³⁴ Collective decision making is democracy at the bare bones level. No one person has all the answers to every question that is presented before a government on a daily basis. The only way to deal with all these problems and issues is to have multiple points of view. The point Khatami is trying to make is it makes sense that a country dominated by one religion should have religious influence in its political actions, however, that doesn’t mean the government should be dominated by clerics because it prevents the best solutions available from being implemented.

The *mullahs* have made it their policy to exclude any mention of Western political institutions from political statements in Iran. “Democracy demands that leaders be accountable to their people. This is precisely why many hard-liners in Iran seek to block normalization of diplomatic relations with the West.”³⁵ Diplomatic relations with the West, particularly the United States, would expose clerics and reformers to the potential economic and political success that awaits them should they choose to incorporate Western political procedures and institutions. The *mullahs* are only concerned with retaining their power in Iran; modifying Iran’s government threatens that goal. The reformers would likely be emboldened by the exposure to the West because the experience of witnessing free people conducting their daily business without fear of government attack would be overwhelming. “(For) any society that wants to advance, nothing instrumental will happen unless its people incorporate Western civilization’s achievements, instead of trying to circumvent them. This requires that we become familiar with Western civilization.”³⁶ The West dominates international politics; therefore, every other nation must understand and utilize some Western political methods in order to conduct political business in forums like the UN. “Since its emergence, and in order to suppress demands for political liberalization, the clerical regime has mislabeled

³⁴ Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Liberty and Development*, (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1998), 7.

³⁵ Reza Pahlavi, *Winds of Change: The Future of Democracy in Iran* (Washington: Regency Publishing, 2002), 30.

³⁶ Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Liberty and Development*, (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1998), 5.

the debate, asking the people to choose between ‘West-toxication’ and national/cultural independence.”³⁷ The *mullahs* continually muddy the domestic political waters of Iran to prevent clear direction for the reform movement. They remind the Iranian people of imperial actions taken by foreign countries against Iran in the past and use this historical memory to manipulate the people’s emotions. “We must confess in all sincerity that life is a collective effort which cannot go forward except through debate, critique, and by recognizing the limitations and relativity of all perspectives.”³⁸ The only perspective permitted in Iran is that of the clerics in power. The *mullahs* know that their legitimacy is only based on the vague constitution; the people have repeatedly demonstrated in protest of regime actions and voted against cleric-supported candidates in elections. Any debate or discussion about the domestic political structures of Iran would result in the changes that the reformers desire and the *mullahs* fear.

Discussion and debate were ideas that found traction in the lead up to the Islamic Revolution because the Shah was oppressive towards opposition groups. Somewhere in the institutionalization of the revolution into a structured government opposition became a problem. The *mullahs* believed that their opinions were the only ones that counted. Common people were not sufficiently educated in Islam to challenge the decisions of their leaders. “We must confront the thought of the opponent by relying on rationality and enlightenment and through offering more powerful and compelling counter arguments.”³⁹ Khatami’s statement has a dual meaning; he is challenging the arguments of the West and the conservative clerics. “The difference between humans and other social animals is that humans learn from their past experience, improve upon it, and leave their achievements for the next generation.”⁴⁰ The development of human knowledge is an inherently evolutionary process. This is most visible in science and technology, but is no less applicable to politics. Look at the evolution of America’s democracy. It has been transformed from a system designed to represent only the views of white males to a

³⁷ Reza Pahlavi, *Winds of Change: The Future of Democracy in Iran* (Washington: Regency Publishing, 2002), 33.

³⁸ Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Liberty and Development*, (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1998), 84.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 64.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 67.

system that represents every citizen regardless of race, religion or sex. These changes came about because minority groups made themselves and their views relevant to American politics. “Khomeini tried to present the split as indicative of pluralism within the Islamic polity and not a power struggle: ‘The clergy are united and there are not two fronts. Of course, there are two groups and two views, it must be [like that]. A society that does not have differences of opinion is imperfect.’”⁴¹

2. Religion and Democracy: A Necessary Collaboration

Authoritarian regimes only serve to promote corruption to retain those in power regardless of their domestic and foreign policy actions. One of Islam’s basic tenets is to embrace good and reject evil. How is it that an unchecked body of political power can be considered good? “One ... possible [motivation] for ... separation of religion and government ... the belief in the fundamental truth of religion coupled with concern over its contamination and profanation by political concerns.”⁴² If religion can be manipulated by politics then the religion is not firmly rooted in faith and religious texts. The perception of religion being manipulated is in its fallible human leaders. However, people often do not separate the two. That is what is occurring in Iran today. The youth of the nation are associating the poor political decisions by the ruling *mullahs* as evidence that Islam as a form of governance is bankrupt. This need not be the case. The rational processes of debate and reasoning that are often to liberal democracies are applicable to the understanding of religion.

If we consider this whole process (expansion of knowledge) evolutionary ... if we regard all truths commensurable and convergent ... and if we further deem humanity more or less successful in the discovery of the truth ... then we will have to declare the odyssey of human knowledge, as a whole, conducive to the happiness and well-being of humankind and ultimately instrumental in comprehending the true message of divine revelation.⁴³

Rational processes of discussion and debate by subject matter experts, in this case clerics, only serves to support and enhance the body of religious knowledge and make the

⁴¹ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 69.

⁴² Abdolkarim Soroush, *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 57.

⁴³ Ibid, p. 60.

religion more believable to the unbelievers. It is only in a democratic atmosphere where this idea can flourish.

There are six prerequisites Soroush establishes for the existence of a religious democracy. First, “[t]he combination of religion and democracy is an example of the concordance of religion and reason. Thus, the efforts and experiments of religiously sympathetic thinkers ... are by no means tainted by antireligious intentions or treacherous tendencies to supplant religiosity with worldliness.”⁴⁴ The framers of the U.S. Constitution were religiously guided people. It is unrealistic to believe that because their vision for America was founded on democratic principles that they disregarded their religious beliefs. In fact, they ensured that regardless of an individual’s religious beliefs they were afforded a voice in how their country was run. This allows for purely religious approaches, purely scientific approaches and approaches that use a mix of each to be given a reasonable opportunity for discussion; nothing is disregarded or accepted at face value.

Second, “the exclusive reliance on the religious laws and myopic focus on intrareligious adjudications ... in order to confirm or reject democratic religiosity is ill-considered and unsound.”⁴⁵ It’s not possible to fit every conceivable situation or invention, material or intellectual, into religious contexts over 1300 years old. The presentation and interpretation of religious texts to people varies with the passage of time. Each item must be assessed for value. Every democratic nation in the world conducts business differently; it is therefore reasonable to believe there is a form of democracy that can accommodate one religious viewpoint, provided that viewpoint is subject to evolution in the perpetual search for truths.

Third, “it is religious understanding that will have to adjust itself to democracy.”⁴⁶ Religious understanding is steeped in tradition that must be reevaluated by the subject matter experts for the validity of its claims. You could not reasonably ask a 19th century physicist to understand the complexities of a contained nuclear reaction for the purpose of generating heat to boil water. However, it doesn’t make the nuclear

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 131.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

reactor any less useful as a component for a modern day warship. The teachers of Islam have been learning the same interpretations of the texts for centuries regardless of whether modern science proves the interpretation to be incorrect. The clerics because they have a strong background in the religious texts of Islam are capable of understanding them in a modern context and updating them to fit the reality of the 21st century. It doesn't mean that their reinterpretations would be wrong because they would be incomprehensible to the clerics of centuries past.

Fourth, “[i]n autocratic governments, the right of arbitration is left to the power and will of the few; in democratic governments, it is left to the dynamic common wisdom; in religious society, it is left to religion.”⁴⁷ This is the source of legitimacy for decisions reached. Often times the motive force for the decision making process is preservation of power and authority. However, if there is someone better equipped to perform the task you are assigned then the greater good of the nation should be most important. Along these lines, religious knowledge is the property of the public. Regardless of what any cleric declares is the correct decision, on a religious matter, the believers must accept his decision as being correct. This goes to the heart of debate and discussion of ideas presented in democratic governing bodies; Republicans and Democrats in the United States each believe they have the correct solution for problems, but in the end the solution that holds up best in the debate is chosen. This carries along the fifth point that “[i]n a religious society, it is not religion per se that arbitrates, but some understanding of religion which is in turn, changing, rational, and in harmony with the consensual and accepted extrareligious criteria.”⁴⁸

Sixth, “[r]eligious society is the supporter, sponsor, source, and succor of the religious politics. Without a religious society, the religious democratic government would be inconceivable.”⁴⁹ Nonbelievers cannot justify the support of a religiously based government because they do not hold the decisions to be correct. The religious democracy can provide a measure of acceptance for unbelievers because “[t]olerance ...

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 132.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

concerns believers not beliefs.”⁵⁰ It is incumbent upon all people under the jurisdiction of that government to respect the right of people to maintain different opinions. That being said, nonbelievers can easily generate a protest movement because of the perception that their opinion doesn’t count. This is precisely why a country that permits plurality in religious beliefs, such as the United States, must segregate its government from religious influence, and why a religiously homogeneous country, such as Iran, must incorporate religion and government.

People interpret religion and produce religious knowledge that is acceptable to large portions of a population; likewise, democracy interprets how a society should conduct itself. “It is true that democracy is ... a method for government ... but it should be remembered that religious society and government owe everything ... to a more fundamental fact: the faith of the faithful.”⁵¹ Legitimacy comes from the people; whether it is belief in religion or support for a government. God gave people a free will and the ability to rationalize and understand the world around them. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that for every person a different interpretation of the correct path exists for himself and his society. When someone is able to prove through logical debate and discussion that their way is the proper way, legitimacy is established.

It seems counter-intuitive that a religious society would want to restrict the thinking of individuals. The religious backbone of a society is typically where the support for the poor and unfortunate is generated. There is no cookbook solution to poverty, which implies freethinking is required to discover new solutions to social problems. It is only in a free and open society, administered by a liberal democratic government that can offer this freedom of thinking. “Liberal democracy draws inspiration and strength from the ... axiom ... human beings are naturally free and unique, their ... opinions are irreducibly disparate and indeterminably dynamic ... restraining this multifarious heterogeneity is neither possible nor desirable.”⁵² Why would a regime want to limit their people’s ability to express opinion? The answer has to be because they fear losing power more than they fear misguiding their people.

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 138.

⁵¹ Ibid, p. 144.

⁵² Ibid.

C. KHATAMI'S ELECTION

After 16 years of cleric rule, the people of Iran started to express their discontent with the political system as it exists. Students, in particular, were frustrated as shown “in April 1995 ... *‘Asr-e Ma* (Our Era) reported the results of an opinion poll of three hundred students in Tehran ... ‘41 percent expressed indifference (to politics) ... 51 percent reported that they ‘experienced a feeling of nihilism and lack of identity,’ while ... 81 percent had ‘a lower inclination toward religion.’”⁵³ These results while limited in scope of the population indicate damning evidence that the government of Iran is failing in its self proclaimed mission to protect Islam. The vision is failing if the educated youth are developing anarchic tendencies and in essence rejecting Islam. The fears expressed during the debate over revising the Constitution about the *marja*’ being the *faqih* appear to coming true despite the conservative clerics best efforts to prevent it.

The people of Iran were starting to see through the mystifying veil of rhetoric being generated by the conservative clerics. The *mullahs* had created a myth, anchored in the legacy of Khomeini, which had been able to perpetuate the revolutionary feel of the government.

A Pareto or a Sorel might argue that in the absence of any one objective truth, the duty of the elite is to create and impose on grand myth that can command the disciplined loyalty of the masses. By contrast, a Mosca or a Shils might arrive at a more pluralist perspective, namely that the very absence of one objective political “truth” requires both tolerance of competing ideas, and a readiness to encourage the masses to sort out these ideas democratically.⁵⁴

Khatami challenged the clerics to let the people decide the best way to operate the government. The command of discipline is nothing more than repressive control. People don’t like to be told what to think and do. As discussed above, people are unique creatures with widely varying opinions on every subject. It is unlikely than any one person or group of people within a society has all the correct answers. Elite doesn’t mean everything they say or do is correct just because they say or do it; being an elite in a society grants their opinion a level of respect, not truth.

⁵³ Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 189.

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 196.

Khatami and his followers have done a comparative analysis in their minds between Iran and the West. They have heard the religious and political rhetoric from the *mullahs* and simultaneously watched the Republic flounder in economic misery. Maslow's hierarchy of needs tells us that before people can reach any level of spiritual enlightenment they must fulfill certain physical needs.⁵⁵ The government cannot provide people the ability to further embrace Islam and spread its message throughout the world when it cannot promote a reasonably successful economic environment. While economic issues are not the thrust of this thesis, they do reveal a very tangible problem with the clerics attempting to label every entity that opposes them as evil.

Khatami brings into focus some democratic principles the West has adopted. "Western civilization ... rests on the idea of 'liberty' or 'freedom.'" Indeed, Khatami affirms, [these are] 'the most cherished values for humans of all ages.'⁵⁶ He is implying that the clerics have used repression and manipulation to maintain their hold on power. Khatami moves on to attack the religious arguments, made by the clerics, that Islam is a fixed set of values and laws. "Khatami ... asserts that (the West's)... casting 'aside the deification of regressive thinking that had been imposed on the masses in the name of religion'"⁵⁷ helped them to discover truths and realize success. Even beyond repression, the clerics have maintained ridiculous antiquated modes of thinking because they viewed updating Islam as altering it from its true path. It was presented earlier that religious knowledge is subject to the context of the time period it is being understood; religion is not a series of fixed regimented traditions of the past. Religion, and hence religious knowledge, is alive and must be allowed to grow and change to accommodate advancements in human understanding of the world around us. Granted all of this must be conducted in the light of the basic tenets of the religion, but the basic tenets must not be confused for ancient and flawed interpretations. As Khatami points out, "repression only aggravates the problem, either by fomenting endless struggles between 'dogmatic' persons, or by whetting the youth's appetite for the very Western ideas that the

⁵⁵ Robert Gwynne, "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs," (1997). Physiological needs come before Security needs, then Love, next Esteem and finally Self-Actualization or spiritual enlightenment.

⁵⁶ Daniel Brumberg, *Reinventing Khomeini: The Struggle for Reform in Iran*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 200.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

government wishes to deny them.”⁵⁸ This is where open discussion and debate could prove beneficial for the clerics. It may be shown that the West does not have all the answers it claims to have for solving Iran’s problems, but preventing the discussion could prove more costly. It is only through debate that the fallacy of your opposition’s argument can be exposed.

Khamane’i addresses the argument that the clergy has the capacity to manipulate and control political discussion. “[T]here is a central organization ... recognized by the people as speaking in the name of religion ... not dependent on any of the organs of power.”⁵⁹ He’s trying to imply that the people chose the course of religion and therefore they hold exclusive legitimacy for the decisions they make. Religion is an integral part of the government. “[T]he ‘Shi’ite clergy ... does not rely on the ruling machinery for money, for a living ... they are free to speak.”⁶⁰ Precisely the opposite is true, because the clergy holds political control over the government they are free to speak. Why else would a free thinker like Soroush be physically attacked by regime supporters for conducting public lectures opposing the position of the leadership of Iran?⁶¹ These supporters have been manipulated to believe that only their opinion is correct and everyone who opposes it should be exiled.

Khatami was forced to walk a fine line between alienating the people who support his campaign and infuriating the clerics by talking about the very ideas the regime wants to suppress. He is careful not to associate himself with the radical members purged from the *Majles*, but gives hope to his constituency the he “[formulates] ... [his] program’ on the basis of the ‘priority and needs of the society’ ... ‘people will be able to vote for ideas’ or ‘programs’ and ‘not for individuals.’”⁶² This is diplomacy and tact at its finest because he is telling the *faqih* that the current interpretation of Khomeini’s legacy is wrong. A person who is not accountable to the people and can therefore dismiss any ideas contradictory to his as un-Islamic should not run the government. He is arguing for

⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 201.

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 218.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid. Soroush was attacked for speaking at universities and forced to end his lectures and leave the country.

⁶² Ibid, p. 220.

the people's right to learn about the world, understand it better and change their collective mind about how to be a part of it. "We should free our society from the old mentality of law-evasion ... and replace it with the mentality of respect for the constitution."⁶³ Khatami is pointing directly to the ruling regime and telling them they have manipulated the structure provided by the Constitution to keep Iran in line with their views. The fact that good, pious, Islamic members of parliament have presented laws and resolutions that run counter to the conservative cleric's ideas has been confused with a radical attack against the foundation of Islam. "Khatami then implies that clerical leadership is a matter of talents and skills, not divine inspiration: 'All talents are not equal in society, and important duties are handed to people who have a higher degree of knowledge.'"⁶⁴ Religious knowledge is a form of human knowledge; therefore it is conceivable that educated members of society can form legislation that supports Islam while contradicting the Leader's judgment.

Khatami also directs his attack against the regime's repressive nature when dealing with opposing voices. The Islamic "system is founded [on] the tradition of criticizing the rival in society ... plotting ideas aimed at your youth ... should be ... answered with counter-thoughts. Thoughts cannot always be answered with prevention and negation."⁶⁵ This is of critical importance because as Soroush claims truths can only be discovered when people are permitted to search for them.

D. KHATAMI FAILS TO DRIVE CHANGE

President Khatami has been unable to implement any significant changes since his election in 1997 despite the overwhelming public support for his policies. "[F]raming the constitution entailed resolving the conundrum of the shared rulership that emerged in the last phase of Khomeini's theory of Islamic state ... the assembly ... provided the clergy and the religious dimension with a level of authority above and beyond that of the people."⁶⁶ It is precisely the structure of Iran's government that prevents Khatami and reformers in the Majles from making changes to the government. The appointed clerical

⁶³ Ibid, p. 221.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 222.

⁶⁶ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 27.

leaders are given their posts by a group of elected clerics, the Assembly of Experts. This establishes a cycle that ensures on point of view dominates the government for the entire existence of that form of government. “Khamenehi criticized Western models of democracy that uphold the supremacy of the rights and sovereignty of the people and argued that ‘sovereignty based on Islamic principles belongs to God, who delegates such rights to people and they in turn choose us [the clergy] as the *faqih* and their representatives.’”⁶⁷ What did God delegate to the clergy? Did he show up and tell them that they had the right to rule Iran however they wanted? Or is this merely an interpretation of Islamic texts that suits the political aspirations of a clergy that was frustrated by the Shah? “Supporters of [article 110] provided various justifications for inserting in the constitution the supreme power of the *vali-ye faqih* and how the crucial post of the head of the republic could not be granted to a fallible president without the holy supervision of the *faqih*.”⁶⁸ The only difference between the President and the *faqih* is their titles. The President and the *faqih* are both men. For some reason the *mullahs* don’t recognize themselves as men. They see themselves as being above the law of man because they teach the word of God. This is the thought process that the reformers are trying to penetrate, but it is so closed minded that the clerics automatically dismiss anything they don’t agree with as un-Islamic. Since they are the “final” arbiters of what is or is not Islamic, no one outside the group can challenge their decisions.

An example of how the reformers have tried to change Iran’s government is with an election law that was brought before the Majles. “[T]he Majlis presented a bill mandating the number of candidates running in elections ... an election would not be legal unless the number of candidates was double the number of seats available for a given district ... all opposition candidates could not be disqualified.”⁶⁹ The reformers wanted to ensure that they had at least one candidate involved in every election because they believed that the people were so frustrated with clerical rule they would vote against any conservative candidate regardless of whom the opposition was. This bill came at a time when the reformers were trying to gain control of the Majles and local governing

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 28.

⁶⁸ Ibid, p. 29.

⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 160.

bodies. “[T]he left could not prove that the bill would indeed lead to more participation and the proposal never received a majority in the parliament.”⁷⁰ Regardless of whether this bill passed the Majles or not, the Guardian Council still had the final say on whether or not the bill would become law. Since, the Guardian Council had just been given carte blanche by the *faqih* to oversee the conduct of all elections it is unlikely to that they would have permitted a law to be passed that would undermine at least marginally some of the power held by the conservative clerics.

E. REFORMIST REACTIONS TO U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The reformers have issued multiple statements regarding their vision of future Iranian foreign policy with regard to the United States. It is also important to look at their reactions to recent foreign policy decisions. There are three major events that will be highlighted in this section: Clinton era policy statements, President Bush’s Axis of Evil State of the Union address and the events surrounding the Iraq War. One can begin to see a pattern of mistakes being made by the U.S. government that is not isolated to one American political party.

The reformers in Iranian politics provide many indications that they generally desire to open up relations with the United States. They are not looking for a friend in the West where they can expand their ideology as much as they want an expanded market to buy and sell goods. “The managing editor of the banned daily *Mellat* stressed: ‘In my view, not only are direct, forceful, and independent ties with America feasible, they are necessary in the current situation to protect Iran from threats and dangers.’”⁷¹ They also see the best way to limit the controlling influence of America by having a direct two way channel for dialogue with the United States. The reformers see communication with the United States as an excellent means to prevent the United States from interfering domestic Iranian affairs. “A member of the Majles National Security Committee said: ‘American officials are pursuing a united strategy. We must avoid providing that country with a pretext and, by strengthening our national foundations as a deterrent factor, act

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ “Deputies, Editors Examine Ways To Deal With US Iran Policy ‘Disagreement’,” *Mardom Salari*, (May 6, 2003).

against the threats.”⁷² The reformers also see diplomatic relations with the United States as a necessary precursor to Iran becoming a major player in the international community and more importantly the dominant political force in the Middle East region. “Mahmud Kianush-Rad, ... a member of the Islamic Consultative Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, said ... ‘We must act tactfully, carefully, and quickly to take advantage of opportunities and to welcome any form of positive stance taken by the different factions within America, in order for us to be able to reduce the threats being considered.’”⁷³ Apparently the Iranians have recognized Israel’s ability to manipulate American politics through the political group AIPAC. The reformers believe that since Iran should have significant importance in international politics and the United States is commonly seen as the world’s hegemon, then the development of a political action group inside the United States dedicated to the promotion of Iranian political desires will allow them to attain their goal of international political power. The reformers are in effect admitting that the United States is the only world power that has any significance.

The reformers while desiring improved relations with the United States reveal that they are still apprehensive about diplomatic relations with Iran’s enemy of more than two decades. “Iranian diplomats have insisted that in order for relations to improve, the United States must show its respect for Iran’s ‘dignity and honor’ by first lifting all sanction, settling billions of dollars in outstanding legal claims, and dropping its opposition to Iran’s serving as a transit route for oil from the Caspian basin.”⁷⁴ In this regard the reformers and the conservative clerics follow the same train of thought; both groups believe the first step to normalizing relations with the United States is that United States must relax some of its anti-Iran policies. This is a where negotiation and diplomatic relations are necessary prior to major changes in U.S. policy. “Washington should make important but limited gestures toward Iran while offering to go much further if Iran reciprocates.”⁷⁵ Opening relations with Iran is a chicken and egg scenario. The reformers may not be able to deliver any changes in Iranian policy because any demands

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Puneet Talwar, “Iran in the Balance,” *Foreign Affairs* (Jul/Aug 2001).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

given by the United States may not be enough to satisfy the *mullahs*, who really control Iran's government. "[T]he Bush administration must separate the question of restoring political ties from the objective of encouraging Iran's moderation and integration as a responsible member of the international community."⁷⁶ Moderation and integration of Iran is likely a natural result of Iran opening diplomatic channels with the United States. How do you ensure some level of positive response by the reformers if the United States does relax some of its anti-Iran policies?

1. Clinton Era Policy Statements

The first opportunity for the United States to open relations with Iran came in the mid-1990s when Conoco was offered a deal to explore for oil in Iran. "[P]resident Rafsanjani later admitted, 'We invited an American firm and entered into a deal ... This was a message to the United States, which was not correctly understood. We had a lot of difficulty in this country by inviting an American company to come here with such a project because of public opinion.'⁷⁷ President Rafsanjani was elected because Iranian public opinion was still supportive of the clerical regime. This statement was issued after President Khatami's election, which as discussed before, was in rebellion against clerical desires for the office. This makes the American rejection of this deal that much more tragic. Since Rafsanjani, who has since joined the reform movement, was able to challenge the clerics and win, albeit a minor battle, shows that the reformers have some domestic negotiating ability. "Washington either did not understand the signal or was insensitive to the strategic implications of Tehran's invitation to Conoco. The Clinton administration response, much to Iran's surprise, was one of total rebuff."⁷⁸ The reformers start to lose confidence in their ability to open relations with the United States because each time they jeopardize their domestic political power to achieve these diplomatic relations the American government rejects their advances.

Khatami's foreign minister opened the next door of opportunity for U.S. – Iranian relations to develop. The unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States were seen by

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Hossein Alikhani, "AIPAC and US Sanctions Against Iran (Part III)," *Tehran Iran Daily* (November 26, 2000).

⁷⁸ Ibid.

the reformers as an opportunity to prove to the conservatives that their hard-line approach with the United States was creating more problems for Iran. If the reformers could convince the United States to change their policy, they would gain legitimacy and domestic support, which in turn would weaken the conservative clerics hold on power.

In September 1999, Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi addressed a gathering on the sideline of the U.N. General Assembly, where he was asked how Iran would respond if the United States dropped its sanctions on the import of Iranian food and carpets. Kharrazi's prepared answer, carefully noted by U.S. policymakers, declared that Iran would 'respond positively' to such a move. In due course, Albright announce six months later the removal of such restrictions. But the positive response promised by Kharrazi never materialized, apparently due to the opposition of Ayatollah Khamenei.⁷⁹

This demonstrates a negotiating problem that exists between the United States and Iran. Robert Putnam explains this problem in his discussion of two level games. "The politics of many international negotiations can usefully be conceived as a two level game ... Each national leader appears at both game boards. Across the international table sit his foreign counterparts ... Around the domestic table behind him sit ... spokespersons for domestic agencies, ... key interest groups, and the leader's own political advisors."⁸⁰ According to Putnam's thesis, any deal made between the reformers and the United States is likely to fail because the reformers must convince the *mullahs* that the results of these negotiations are beneficial to Iran as a whole. "Any key player at the international table who is dissatisfied with the outcome may upset the game board, and conversely, any leader who fails to satisfy his fellow players at the domestic table risks being evicted from his seat."⁸¹ The *mullahs* are not likely to support any agreements negotiated by the reformers because those agreements could potentially weaken the *mullahs* domestically.

2. The Axis of Evil State of the Union Address

The reformers took a distinctly anti-American stance when reacting to President Bush's Axis of Evil Speech. The reformers have become somewhat fearful of the current American administration because of its reaction to the events of September 11th.

⁷⁹ Puneet Talwar, "Iran in the Balance," *Foreign Affairs* (Jul/Aug 2001).

⁸⁰ Robert D Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: The Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization Vol. 42, No. 3* (Summer 1988): 434.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Although following the 11th of September such changes (from ‘carrot and stick’ to direct threats in the State of the Union address) were more or less expected, the intensity of the shift and turn in policy was extremely sharp and unexpected ... This shows that ... US politicians have become somehow certain that they can take advantage of this rare opportunity ... to secure their superior role.⁸²

The reformers have become apprehensive because they see U.S. foreign policy increasing its aggressive stance in the international community. It is this aggressive attitude of American politicians that is damaging yet another potential path to warming relations between Iran and the United States. Aggressive American foreign policy also forces the reformers to align with the *mullahs* for the protection of Iran as a whole. If the reformers start an internal conflict with the conservative clerics, they believe the domestic weakness of Iran would leave it vulnerable to U.S. intervention and influence.

Two important characteristics in US foreign policy can be observed ... which, on the one hand, demonstrate structural changes in the system and, on the other, are a sign of change in the role and function of US foreign policy ... These two characteristics are first, speed and the surprise factor and the second ... is the active and main role played by the US in orienting world developments.⁸³

The reform movement in Iran desires diplomatic interaction with the United States, but not at the expense having Iran’s future in international relations dominated by the United States. Iran, specifically the reformers, will decide Iran’s future.

3. The Iraq War

The reform movement in Iran agrees with the United States removing Saddam Husayn from power in Iraq. “Bahaeddin Adab (a Majlis deputy) said: ‘Iran’s stance towards the issues surrounding Iraq in the world should be the democratization of that country and the removal of Saddam’s government.’”⁸⁴ Reformers desire to expand democratic values in Iran’s government while simultaneously removing a regional threat in the person of Saddam Husayn. To the reformers, having a democratic neighbor increases the pressure on the conservative clerics to reform the government. “‘If in some cases we adopt the same strategy as some European countries – and in practice, whether

⁸² “Paper analyzes new US foreign policy moves, objectives,” *Mardom Salari* (February 12, 2002).

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ “Deputy calls for removal of Saddam, democratization of Iraq,” *Mardom Salari* (December 25, 2002).

we like it or not, this is the case – that would not be very strange.”⁸⁵ Iran shouldn’t disagree with the West, just because the West issues a strategy. Iran must act in its own interests regardless of who else supports a similar strategy.

There is recognition by the reform movement in Iran that the opponents to the U.S. led war against Iraq were placing their own international political status above the individual suffering of the Iraqi people with Saddam Husayn in power. “[T]he efforts and stubbornness of states such as France, Germany, Russia, China and some other countries toward a US attack on Iraq are not out of pity and concern for the suffering people. The (Iraqi) people are forced to verbally support the Iraqi dictator and hide their opposition to the regime.”⁸⁶ These countries attempted to prevent the United States from invading Iraq through direct negotiations with the Bush administration, public statements designed to enflame the American public opinion and obstruction tactics in the United Nations Security Council. “If the United States resorted to military attack and the opposing European states could do nothing and a government comprising all Iraqi opposition groups came to power after the decline of Saddam, how would it be possible [for Iran] to start cooperation with the future government of Iraq, or at least make sure of their neutrality toward ... Iran?”⁸⁷ The reformers are concerned about Iraq becoming a satellite state in the Middle East for the United States, especially when they consider the hostile Iran – U.S. relationship. “Perhaps ‘history’ in the ‘future’ would respect all those who tried to prevent the ‘war,’ but ‘pinning hopes on history’ cannot replace ‘vital interests’ that would be gained by Iran and the Iranian nation through cooperation with opponents of Saddam.”⁸⁸ It seems logical to the reformers that Iran should support the U.S. policy of regime change in Iraq because of the potential security implications. “From a realistic point of view, the downfall of Saddam has been in favour of peace in the region.”⁸⁹ Unfortunately for the United States, the Bush administration either ignored or was too preoccupied with war plans to listen to the statements being made by those associated

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Javad Tamimi, “Downfall of a Dictator,” *Mardom Salari* (March 18, 2003).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ “Academic Comments on Iran's Policy Towards Iraq, Afghanistan, US,” *Mardom Salari* (August 20, 2003).

with the reform movement and missed another opportunity to open diplomatic relations with Iran. “If Iran acts with realism and free from any form of ideological views, she should not regard America as her enemy and should not ask the Iraqi Shi’is to confront America. Iran should leave the matter to the Iraqi people ... We should play a positive role so that order and security may be established in Iraq as soon as possible.”⁹⁰ Stability in Iraq equates to increased security for Iran.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

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IV. THE MULLAH GOVERNMENT

A. INTRODUCTION

The *mullahs* control many of the significant levers of power in Iran and use them to ensure they retain control over the government. Most significant is the power given to the Supreme Leader by Iran's Constitution. Equally important is control over the court system because the *mullahs* can keep their political opponents from gaining momentum by enforcing vague laws about criticizing the regime or acting against the revolution. These are only two of the many centers of power controlled by the *mullahs*.

The use of these levers of power simultaneously keeps them in power today but is driving them from power today. The conservative clerics have ties to radical groups throughout Iran than exist for the sole purpose of ensuring the people they see conduct themselves in a properly Islamic manner. Of course no rules, standards or guidelines are written in any legal documentation that people can follow. These radical groups can exercise as much force in almost any situation to "correct" a violation. It is well known by the Iranian people that these groups work directly for the Leader and other clerics in the political leadership. It is these oppressive tactics that have been greatly responsible for the demise of the popularity of Iranian clerics, regardless of their involvement in the political system of Iran.

The political statements issued by *mullahs* and conservative publications reveal a continuing trend of oppression of opposing viewpoints. Resalat is a conservative publication, and is used to illustrate the *mullahs* views towards American foreign policy actions. The actual situations addressed are viewed through a lens of contempt for the United States. They fail to realize that their statements, actions and demands only perpetuate the problems they claim the United States is causing. It is in this hostility that they are able to prevent the reformers, a liberal regime, from gaining strength domestically. The hostility of the *mullahs* as demonstrates their desire to maintain a protectionist policy against potential foreign influences, primarily the United States. The more hostile they are towards the United States, the more the United States reciprocates the hostility, which in turn forces the reformers to defend Iran by at least tacitly

supporting the stance being taken by the *mullahs*. A quick comparison of the statements made the *mullahs* and the reformers, when the United States takes an anti-Iranian foreign policy position, reveals that they become strikingly similar.

B. IRAN'S CURRENT GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

The Iranian government has multiple centers of power each with their own domains of control; the figures in charge of each center can shift the direction of Iran's political decisions by forming and breaking ad hoc domestic alliances. In general certain positions in Iran's government have been held exclusively by conservative clerics; primarily the Leader, the Head of the Judiciary and the Council of Guardians. Each of these positions corresponds to the three branches of Iran's government for oversight, the executive, judicial and legislative respectively. Regardless of what decisions and actions the elected officials of Iran's government takes they will never be the final decision as long as this structure is in place. The prospect for change in the Iranian government being initiated by the *mullahs* is not very good because they would have to sacrifice their monopoly on power.

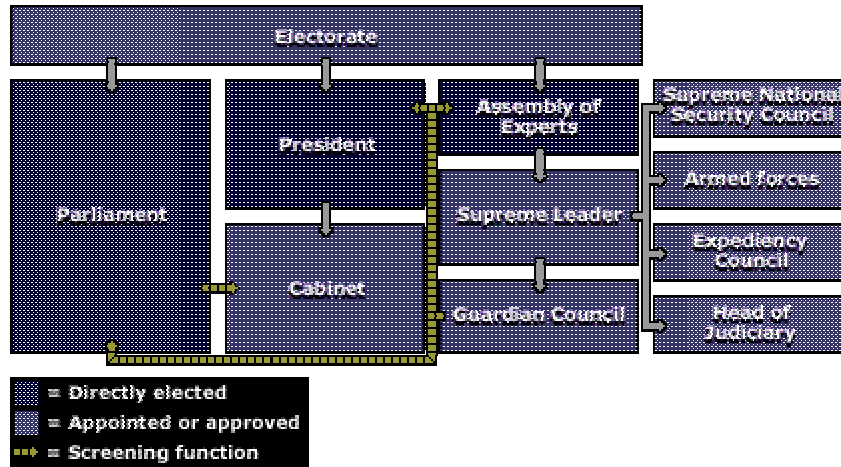


Figure 1: Who selects the members for each functionary?⁹¹

1. The Supreme Leader

The monopoly the conservative clerics hold hinges on the Leader, or *faqih*. The *faqih* appoints half the members of the Guardian Council and the Head of the Judiciary (Fig. 1). This ensures the *mullahs* and their political views continue to be the source of

⁹¹ "Iran: The Struggle for Change," 2000, BBC News Online.

Iran's political decisions, regardless of the people's political desires. However, when the Constitution of Iran was adopted, it was the people that ratified it and made this system become law. So there is an inherent problem with Iran's constitution because its implementation required public support, but once in place public opinion could be ignored. There is no mechanism for reform and change in Iran's Constitution.

The Leader is given all the major levers of power in Iran by the Constitution. The reform movement has been calling for a national referendum on whether or not the structure of Iran's government should be changed to make the office of the Leader accountable to the people. As listed below in Table 1, it is the Leader who must issue a decree for any national referenda. It seems completely illogical to expect the Leader to issue a referendum that could remove him from power. The Leader also controls the security forces and military in Iran, which would prevent a revolution to forcibly remove the conservative clerics from power.

A review of the duties and powers of the Leader gives one the impression that Iran has created a constitutional dictatorship because the *faqih* has overall control over the political decisions made by Iran. The head of the Judiciary, who is appointed by the *faqih*, is only accountable to the *faqih* for how he operates Iran's court system. The Guardian Council is obligated by the constitution to review every resolution passed by the Majles to ensure it doesn't conflict with their interpretation of Islam. The head of Iranian radio and television is also appointed by the *faqih*, which enables him to control the content of news broadcasts and broadcast entertainment.

Article 110 Duties and Powers of the Leader	
(1)	Following are the duties and powers of the Leadership:
1.	Delineation of the general policies of the Islamic Republic of Iran after consultation with the Nation's Exigency Council.
2.	Supervision over the proper execution of the general policies of the system.
3.	Issuing decrees for national referenda.
4.	Assuming supreme command of the Armed Forces.
5.	Declaration of war and peace and the mobilization of the Armed Forces.

6.	Appointment, dismissal, and resignation of:
a.	the religious men on the Guardian Council,
b.	the supreme judicial authority of the country,
c.	the head of the radio and television network of the Islamic Republic of Iran,
d.	the chief of the joint staff,
e.	the chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps, and
f.	the supreme commanders of the Armed Forces.
7.	Resolving differences between the three wings of the Armed Forces and regulation of their relations.
8.	Resolving the problems which cannot be solved by conventional methods, through the Nation's Exigency Council.
9.	Signing the decree formalizing the election of the President of the Republic by the people. The suitability of candidates for the Presidency of the Republic, with respect to the qualifications specified in the Constitution, must be confirmed before elections take place by the Guardian Council, and, in the case of the first term of a President, by the Leadership.
10.	Dismissal of the President of the Republic, with due regard for the interests of the country, after the Supreme Court holds him guilty of the violation of his constitutional duties, or after a vote of the Islamic Consultative Assembly testifying to his incompetence on the basis of Article 89.
11.	Pardoning or reducing the sentences of convicts, within the framework of Islamic criteria, on a recommendation from the Head of judicial power.
(2)	The Leader may delegate part of his duties and powers to another person.

Table 1: Article 110 of the Iranian Constitution⁹²

2. The Court System

The Iranian Judicial system is designed to be strictly hierarchical where each successive level is appointed by and responsible to the one above. “In addition to having wide latitude in interpreting and applying the Shari’a, the Supreme Judicial Council has the ultimate authority over the appointment, promotion suspension, and dismissal of all judges in the country.”⁹³ This automatically restricts even the most liberal minded judge

⁹² “Iran – Constitution,” 1992.

⁹³Nader Entessar, “Limits of Change: Legal Constraints to Political Reform in Iran,” *Journal of Third*

to follow the legal interpretations established by higher courts. Only a judge not satisfied with continuing their career in the court system of Iran would openly challenge how Iran's laws have been interpreted since the founding of the Islamic Republic. "[T]he Council is answerable only to the *faqih* and not to Iran's president. Therein lies one of the structural weaknesses of the country's chief executive."⁹⁴ The Judicial system is also only checked by the *faqih*, who appoints the head of the judiciary in the first place. There is no mechanism for confirmation or removal by the Majles or the executive. "[T]he Supreme Judicial Council determines the laws under which the Supreme Court operates."⁹⁵ There is no mechanism to balance the Judiciary. It functions according to its own rules as dictated by the *faqih*. "The head of the Supreme Court must be a *mujtahid* and is appointed to his post by the *faqih* and is answerable to him."⁹⁶

The operation of the Iranian courts is not governed by any set standards or procedures. The Supreme Court, as discussed above, sets its own rules, but the Revolutionary Courts have their own set of vague rules that are subject to interpretation on a daily basis. "From their limited early jurisdiction, the mandate of the Revolutionary Courts has been vastly expanded and now includes jurisdiction over the following categories of offenses: 'waging war on God' and 'spreading corruption on earth,' neither of which has been defined by law and hence are left to the discretion of a Revolutionary Court judge."⁹⁷ This is especially important when one realizes that the radical groups, under the control of the *faqih*, are able to bring Iranian citizens before these courts to be prosecuted for violating these vague and undefined offenses. "In 1987, a new category of courts was set up for the purpose of trying clerics of 'counter-revolutionary and anticlerical crimes.' ... established to oust clerics who are not supportive of the Islamic Republic's policies and other dissidents in the ranks of Iran's clerics."⁹⁸ The *mullahs* established a mechanism to prevent liberal clerics from attaining the necessary rank to hold a seat in the Assembly of Experts or to become the *faqih*. Preventing clerics who

World Studies (Spring 2002).

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

disagree with the conservative point of view decreases the possibility of having the pluralistic system.

The combined effects of oppressing the general public when they speak out against the regime and removing clerics, who have the only legitimate chance of reforming the government from within the system, has increased the hostility of the Iranian people toward the clerical government of Iran. It has the “calming effect” of preventing short-term attacks against the regime, but is creating a grassroots movement bent on removing the clerics from power.

C. BETRAYING THE PEOPLE

1. Oppression of Opposition

There is a growing outrage among the Iranian people that clerics no longer stand for helping people, but have become fixated on ruling them. “[M]oral guidance has been replaced by clerical censorship and dictatorial fiat.”⁹⁹ The act of becoming a Muslim is by admission of the Qur’an a free and unforced act. Religious leaders exist for the sake of helping and guiding people to make the correct choices in their lives, not to establish laws that are intended to force people to act according to their religious interpretations. “[R]eligious law itself is dependent on thought, and does not in and of itself give form and function to thoughts.”¹⁰⁰ It is not possible to create a single or even multiple texts that provide a direct answer for each situation a person may encounter in their lifetime. Religion and religious knowledge exist to give believers a set of truths to base the decisions of their life upon. Religion is a state of mind or a perspective from which the world is viewed that allows believers to understand things that are happening around them from more than just the physical perspective inherent in all humans. “I believe that if we are fair and profound in our thinking, we will reach the conclusion that freedom has priority over growth.”¹⁰¹ President Khatami is educated in Islamic studies and is a low ranking cleric who understands that the complex problems facing Iran cannot be solved by one group of people forcing their views on the rest of Iran. All Iranians must be given

⁹⁹ Reza Pahlavi, *Winds of Change: The Future of Democracy in Iran* (Washington: Regency Publishing, 2002), 27.

¹⁰⁰ Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Liberty and Development*, (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1998), 10.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, p. 15.

the opportunity to express their individual concerns so that political leaders can balance these concerns against the religious guidelines of Islam. “The court systems, intelligence services, and organs of control and repression are all in the hands of the hard-liners – even the state media.”¹⁰² The pessimism of the people that surrounds the Iranian government is laying the groundwork for a revolt, quite possibly a violent one, which could see the clerics excluded from future involvement in the political process. Every group in Iran has a valid point that must be discussed and weighed against the views of other groups in order to determine what is best for Iran. The system as designed ensures only one point of view is used when charting Iran’s future.

The Neo-fundamentalists are the street level muscle the conservatives exercise to perpetuate the feeling of fear in those who would openly challenge the regime on its policies. “[T]he ability of neo-fundamentalists to act in an unobstructed way is due to the indirect support they receive from the conservative right, which is aimed at weakening the post-1994 alliance of the modern right and the left.”¹⁰³ The modern right and the left are the two major factions in Iran that make up the bulk of the reform movement. The conservatives actively pursue a policy of divide and conquer when dealing with the reformers. This policy has been in existence since the establishment of the Islamic Republic and directed as necessary against the greatest opponents to the rule of the conservative clerics.

The process of creating the Islamic Republic of Iran ... set certain political precedents ... encouraged hostility toward the central government’s authority and institutions ... ignored the law and acted independently of the central government ... a prevailing feature of the postrevolutionary regime soon became the implementation of law ... by the revolutionary organizations.¹⁰⁴

Any group, portraying itself as revolutionary, was given free license, by the *mullahs*, to enforce the vague concept of Islamic principles on the Iranian population. This led to many confrontations between factions that believed they truly upheld the best interests of Iran.

¹⁰² Reza Pahlavi, *Winds of Change: The Future of Democracy in Iran* (Washington: Regency Publishing, 2002), 41.

¹⁰³ Mehdi Moslem, *Factional Politics in Post-Khomeini Iran*, (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 135.

One of the biggest confrontations with the left, one that also reveals conservatives' support for the Neo-fundamentalists, came when MP Ali Mohammad Gharibani ... compared the *Ansar* to those hooligan watch dogs who surrounded the shah, referring to them as a 'bunch of brainless thugs.' In response, the *Ansar* marched through the streets chanting anti-left slogans and issued a manifesto that had three main components: the *velayat-i faqih* is the fundamental principle of the Islamic Republic, the *faqih* must be obeyed, and all must engage in PVPV. Given such principles, in addition to its combat with the modern right and the left, it is no wonder that the conservatives have more than 'tolerated' this faction.¹⁰⁵

Apparently the best interests for Iran, as defined by the *mullahs*, are to accept their decisions without thinking about them. Those that challenged the decisions of the conservatives found themselves confronted with the threat of physical violence.

The conservative clerics used their dominance in the government to change the candidacy rules in order to reduce the chance that someone outside their political group gained a seat in the Majles or any other elected political office. "Unless the conservative-dominated Council or the leader (the conservative Khamenehi) attested to the religious qualifications of candidates, they would not get a seat on the assembly."¹⁰⁶ Again, no standards were set that the candidates could measure themselves against prior to declaring their intentions to run for a political office. "[T]he radicals in the Majlis asked the Guardian Council for clarification of the Council's supervisory role in elections ... The Council ... announced that its supervisory role was 'approval supervisory' ... which meant that all candidates had to be accepted by the Council regardless of approval of the ministry of interior (whom the left controlled)."¹⁰⁷ The Guardian Council, after being given permission by Khamenei, superceded the role of the ministry of interior. Part of the mission of the ministry of the interior is to ensure the fair and equitable conduct of elections in Iran. This clearly became a tool for the conservative clerics to impact the results of elections just by limiting participants that opposed their political views. "Khamenehi essentially gave (the Guardian Council) carte blanche to dismiss the eligibility of candidates from the left, handing them the excuse of removing those

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, p. 139. PVPV means Propagation of Virtue and Prohibition of Vice

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, p. 157.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, p. 160.

opposed to *velayat-e faqih* ... 'If some one speaks and writes in opposition to the views of the *faqih*, he is anti-*velayat-e faqih*.'"¹⁰⁸ When in the history of political elections has a new candidate trying to unseat an incumbent agreed with the incumbent's political views? The whole point of challenging the incumbent is because the new candidate opposes their political views. Since the majority of the members of the Majles in the early 1990's were from the conservative camp, that automatically puts new candidates into the category of opposing the views of the *faqih*. "Interior minister Abdollah Nuri announced that 'an open [unrestrained] election indicates the sovereignty of people, while a restricted one indicates the division between the state and the people ... We should never think that the choice of the people is flawed.'"¹⁰⁹ The actions of a few men in powerful positions in the government were telling the 60 plus million citizens of Iran that they don't have the intellectual capacity to determine which political candidates are right for Iran.

2. Lost Legitimacy

The religious history of Islam has been used to provide justification for the political actions of Muslims. "[T]hose Muslims who seek democracy argue that Muhammad was the first democrat ... those advocating socialism depict Muhammad as the first socialist ... What this persistent attitude of mind does reveal is the continued importance of the early Muslim community as political model."¹¹⁰ This attitude also demonstrates how religious history can be manipulated in current day politics. There is no absolute truth when discussing and understanding history; the inherent ambiguity allows for political justification for almost any action. The majority opinion of Iran opposes the conservative clerics' understanding of Islamic history.

Islamic governments have an historical legacy that requires them to support and often times protect the umma. "Government was to be obeyed provided it did not actively prevent pious Muslims from carrying out their religious obligations. An implicit quid pro quo had been struck between the umma and its rulers. If the rulers refrained from

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 181.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 183.

¹¹⁰ L. Carl Brown, *Religion and State: The Muslim Approach to Politics*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 49.

interfering in matters of faith, the ruled would obey and not insist on any specific religious principles of political conduct.”¹¹¹ How can the Iranian people make the conservative *mullahs* see that they are interfering with matters of faith? The *mullahs* have become so focused on holding power that they have resorted to the very same tactics that caused them to rise up against the Shah. Now the people of Iran associate political oppression with religion. “[T]he second caliph, Umar, who called upon the people to correct him should he inadvertently make a mistake. One of the congregation brusquely told Umar to have no fear on that score, for any such deviation would be corrected ‘with our swords.’ Umar, it is related, then praised God for such an umma.”¹¹² Anytime the Iranian people begin to gather strength to protest and challenge the conservative clerics, they are met with military and security forces that literally beat them into submission. These actions seem counter to what Umar was thanking God for when he was caliph.

Our role as thinkers is to realize that even if development means repeating the Western experience, we still have to fathom its basic tenants and their implications. This represents the most important calling for real intellectualism and thinking ... without rationality real development will be impossible to attain ... development is not a mechanical process that can be achieved in the absence of rational human beings ... a society that is devoid of rational thinking will lose its balance as soon as it encounters problems ... human difficulties cannot be solved through reliance on force, strict laws, and the decrees of politicians.¹¹³

The government that rules the Islamic Republic of Iran has turned away from the history of Islam in order to preserve itself. The conservative political rulers cannot accept political ideas that are not developed from within their camp because they believe it means their usefulness has been exceeded. On the contrary, it is their rejection of outside ideas that means their time as the political leaders in Iran has been exceeded.

The people of Iran have grown weary from political rhetoric because individuals are not seeing any improvement in their everyday lives. The people believe that they should have more control over the direction the government moves domestically and in

¹¹¹ Ibid, p. 54.

¹¹² Ibid, p. 55.

¹¹³ Mohammad Khatami, *Islam, Liberty and Development*, (Binghamton, NY: Binghamton University, Institute of Global Cultural Studies, 1998), 28-9.

the international arena. "Foreign-policy activism is no longer seen as a substitute for meeting the growing domestic crisis; rather, foreign policy is now seen as a possible way to reduce pressure on the regime, by ending isolation and increasing its access to resources, investment, etc."¹¹⁴ The anti-American stance of the conservative clerical regime is what feeds the United States desire to continue its unilateral economic sanctions. While the sanctions have not completely isolated Iran, they have limited Iran's ability to engage in worldwide commerce.

The Khatami phenomenon both reflects and encourages a growing, questioning, civil society that demands the right to be included in and to influence decision-making, prompted by a new sense of skepticism about the received wisdom that the regime's religious and political authorities transmit. The hardliners accept the need for some accommodation of this phenomenon without accepting the need for the structural reforms that are necessary if it is to be effective.¹¹⁵

The *mullahs* are trying to pay lip service to the reformers' ideas that have become so popular with the population in order to deflect and delay any demands for changes in the government. Perhaps they believe that this reform movement is a passing storm that the clerics must weather. However, doubts in the minds of the Iranian people about the ability of the clerics to lead Iran to international prominence are not likely to be resolved. The religious leadership of Iran has yet to prove to its people that they know how to manage Iran's economy and resolve international problems with rival nations.

D. MULLAH REACTIONS TO U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

The conservative clerics over the past 24 years have perfected the art of antagonizing the United States. They have been able to keep America engaged in anti-Iranian policies that have helped the *mullahs* maintain their hold on power. "Hamidreza Hajji-Baba'i, ... a member of the Islamic Consultative Majles National Security and Foreign Policy Committee (said) ... 'When it (America) has a more conciliatory tone with Iran, it is not as if Iran will easily abandon its stance because of America's conciliatory words, or for it to be easily deceived by America's words and behavior.'"¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ Shahram Chubin, *Wither Iran?: Reform Domestic Politics and National Security*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

¹¹⁶ "Deputies, Editors Examine Ways To Deal With US Iran Policy 'Disagreement'," *Mardom Salari*, (May 6, 2003).

There is an obvious distrust between Iran and the United States that words alone cannot resolve. The aggressive stance of the United States against Iran was even shown to bring the reformers statements in line with the conservatives. Strong international pressure is weakening the domestic liberal constituency in Iran. "I suggest that you (America) should try to change your ways if you really want to put an end to your worries. You should start to respect other nations and give credit to the other people of the world."¹¹⁷ U.S. politicians constantly refer to the United States as a compassionate country that strives to expand freedom and democracy to all people of the world. However, a global U.S. military presence, concentrated in the Middle East, and repeated saber rattling in international organizations like the UN have given the United States a reputation among smaller countries, like Iran, that it is an international bully. "You think that Iran is going to give in to you just because you have imposed sanctions on us. This is sheer simplemindedness. During the last 15 years or so, this country has shown that all you ploys and conspiracies are doomed to failure."¹¹⁸ Yazdi knows that the international community does not share the American hostility toward Iran. He expects the United States to continue wasting its international political capital on futile exploits like unilateral sanctions on Iran. Eventually, the United States will wear itself down and the cooperative European nations that have continued to trade with Iran will dominate international politics.

1. Clinton Era Policy Statements

The conservatives desire tangible actions by the United States rather than apologetic statements. In response to positive comments in the liberal Iranian press, the conservative press fired back that:

These publications believe that Mrs. Albright's apologies for some of America's improper and occasionally hostile acts against Iran over the past half-century indicate that the White House is taking practical steps to fulfill Iran's states expectations regarding the improvement of relations with Tehran. However, the mere fact that in her statement, the US State Secretary denounced her country's actions ... does not mean that US

¹¹⁷ "Yazdi Delivers Friday Prayer Sermon," Tehran Radio, (June 16, 1995). Quote from Ayatollah Mohammed Yazdi, head of the Judiciary.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

officials are taking steps to rectify or compensate for the treacherous, criminal acts perpetrated against Iran during the past fifty years.¹¹⁹

Iran has an extensive laundry list of complaints that the United States must fulfill before they will open diplomatic relations. The *mullahs* believe that regardless of any positive actions taken by Iran to restore U.S. – Iran diplomatic relations the American government will only see these actions as a means to deflect U.S. political pressure, not an actual change in the character of the regime. “[I]n practice, America not only fails to take practical steps to tear down the wall of mistrust; it continues to make blatantly [false] accusations against Iran.”¹²⁰ Even the apologetic tone of Madeline Albright is undercut when the Clinton administration continued to issue statements that Iran must refrain from supporting terrorism, interfering in the Middle East peace process and exporting the Revolution beyond Iran’s borders. These U.S. demands are equally as ambiguous as the Iranian demands, but Iran continued to see dissention and conflict in American foreign policy. “An overall study of the US State Secretary’s statement, leads us once again to the conclusion that the wall of mistrust between Iran and America stands as tall and sturdy as ever.”¹²¹ The realist view that has dominated U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East must be replaced by understanding how to use politics to manipulate domestic politics in a rival country. As long as the United States continues to focus primarily on changes required by the Iranian government, the Iranian government will continue to reciprocate its demands and the stalemate will be perpetuated.

2. The Axis of Evil State of the Union Address

President Bush openly challenged the Iranian government by labeling them as part of the axis of evil signaling U.S. intent to continue economic sanctions while trying to gather international acceptance for expanded diplomatic pressure. “Iran has constantly reiterated it has not been and will not be willing to access weapons of mass destruction as it has repeated its call on the US to put any piece of evidence it holds with regard to the issue on the table of legitimate international tribunals.”¹²² The pursuit of WMD is on the list of U.S. complaints about Iranian policies. The *mullahs* are trying to weaken the

¹¹⁹ Farzad Samadli, “If We Don’t Deliberately Close Our Eyes,” *Resalat* (March 26, 2000).

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Khosro Nazari, “It Is High Time US Reviewed Its Iran Policy,” *Tehran Times* (February 17, 2002).

American argument against Iran by coloring American statements as false and contrived. “Top Iranian officials have proclaimed since the beginning of the so-called US-led anti-terrorism campaign that Iran is extremely keen to help rid the world of any terrorist group or entity but only under the supervision of the United Nations. It has repeatedly questioned the legitimacy and qualifications of the US to take the lead in this global campaign.”¹²³ The *mullahs* are trying to demonstrate their desire to be a part of the war on terror rather than the target of it. They also want to enhance the positions of countries that continue to trade in Iran by undermining the legitimacy of America’s leadership role in the fight against terror.

The relatively positive relationships between Iran and European nations exist because the Europeans have taken a broader view of the Middle East as potentially beneficial members of the international community rather than breeding grounds for terrorist organizations. “[I]t was announced in the European Union that unlike in America, fighting terrorism is considered to be only part of the foreign policy of the European countries and Europe neither can nor wants to base its foreign policy of ‘fighting terrorism’ like the Americans. Today a number of these countries are not accepting America’s definition of ‘axis of evil’”¹²⁴ The *mullahs* have responded positively to the reduced focus on Iran by the Europeans. This may be a tactic by the *mullahs* to reduce American diplomatic pressure in order to further their own regional desires.

3. The Iraq War

The conservative clerics see the situation in Iraq as a prime opportunity to expand the Revolution into another country, especially because Shiites dominate the Iraqi population. The *mullahs* are countering arguments by the reformers that Iraqis desire democracy in the form that the West uses.

It is clear that until a few weeks ago, the people of Iraq endured great pressures under the dictator regime of Saddam Husayn ... the dictator filled the minds of its people with anti-Iranian and anti-Islamic Revolution propaganda ... It only seemed natural that ... after 25 years of being brainwashed ... the Iraqi people would dislike and at least have doubts

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ “Conservative paper comments on US reliance on military might,” *Resalat* (June 8, 2002).

about the government and nation of Iran and the Islamic Revolution. But surprisingly ... the Iraqi people have been in complete concord with the motto's and objectives of the Iranian nation.¹²⁵

The Iraqis making comments that are supportive of a government for Iraq modeled from Iran's government are by Iraqi exiles that spent many years continuing their Islamic studies and opposition to Saddam in Qom. The United States identifies them as an interfering group supported by Iran rather than a groundswell of support for an Islamic Republic of Iraq. Regardless of the ground truth, without media self-censorship and spin, the *mullahs* want to deflect attention from their engagement in Iraqi affairs.

The conservatives challenge the United States stated role of stabilizing Iraq before it turns over complete sovereignty to the Iraqi people. "Iraq's future continues to be ambiguous; and America either lacks any comprehensive plan for such a future or the ability to come up with such a plan."¹²⁶ Continued ambush attacks by covert militant groups are feeding the *mullah's* theory that the United States charged into Iraq without a coherent plan. They also believe that the American military is not prepared to fight the guerilla war that is unfolding in Iraq. "The members of Iraq's provisional cabinet were introduced. This is a step in the direction of placing the Iraqi people's fate into their own hands. However, as long as the occupation forces are present in Iraq and ... the date of their full withdrawal ... has not been set, stability will not return to Iraq."¹²⁷ Shrouded in this complement on the progress of developing Iraqi domestic politics is the confusion and distraction that the presence of American troops creates for the Iraqi people. "[T]he main element for the disorder in Iraq was the American attack on that country. Those who sought to destroy Saddam's regime, ended up destroying the Iraqi state."¹²⁸ The *mullahs* did not like Saddam being in power in Iraq, but a common argument in the Middle East is the enemy of my enemy is my friend. Perhaps the conservatives believed they could wait until Saddam died which would likely create a domestic political crisis and provide the Iranians an opportunity to assist the Shiites in their desire to gain power

¹²⁵ Naser Imani, "The Iraqi Example," *Resalat* (April 24, 2003).

¹²⁶ "Commentary Notes Need for US Withdrawal from Iraq," *Resalat* (September 3, 2003).

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

in a government that already had the necessary institutions in place to keep the country of Iraq functioning.

The conservative *mullahs* want to demonstrate to their domestic audience and the world that America has merely replaced Saddam as a tyrant over the Iraqis rather than liberating them from oppression. “The explosion in UN headquarters in Iraq that led to more than 120 dead and wounded, indicates the Americans failure in maintaining security in Iraq ... by asking other countries to dispatch forces to Iraq, (America) implicitly confessed to their weakness and failure in maintaining security in that country.”¹²⁹ The implication is that the Americans will resort to any means in order to restore order to Iraq and protect its soldiers. “Bremer, the American ruler of Iraq, forbade the Iraqi media and television to broadcast the news regarding the attacks on US goals and interests in Iraq. Moreover, the main bulk of news relating to the attacks against the American military is censored.”¹³⁰ The *mullahs* believe that America is presenting the situation in Iraq in the best light possible in order to prevent a similar collapse in public opinion as what occurred in the 1960’s during the Vietnam War. “[T]he Iraqi people ... are beginning to understand that opening fire on the crowds that are opposed to America’s military presence and are demanding a native government is one of the first steps taken by Jay Garner in order to intimidate those who might use their votes for what is contrary to the interests of the United States.”¹³¹ The *mullahs*’ biggest fear is that Iraq will become a democratic nation friendly to the United States which can be used as a base of operations for increased attacks against their government. They will continue to structure their statements to increase America’s hostility to Iran in order to prevent a positive international image of the United States from developing.

¹²⁹ Ali Qasemi, “Iraqi security in coma,” *Resalat* (August 24, 2003).

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “Iranian daily criticizes US behavior in Iraq,” *Resalat* (May 3, 2003).

V. CONCLUSIONS

A. PATTERNS OF BAD DECISIONS

Iran has been an area of vital importance for the United States since it became heavily involved in the Middle East following WWII. Unfortunately for Iran, its status in American policy making meant that it should be controlled by the United States. This relationship led to three major events in Iranian history: the coup to overthrow Mohammed Mossadegh, the White Revolution and the Islamic Revolution. The Mossadegh coup has created a general distrust for any foreign power expressing interest in Iran because the Central Intelligence Agency sponsored the removal of a popular prime minister. The greater concern at the time was Mossadegh's relationship with the socialist Tudeh party in Iran. In 1953, the United States was very concerned about the Soviet Union expanding into countries that America considered to be allies. Therefore, the United States was prepared to do anything to prevent the Soviet Union from expanding its area of control into Iran.

The next major event was the White Revolution. The Shah began to implement several changes in Iranian economic policy that was intended to assist the poor in his country. Many of the actions taken by the Shah were at the recommendation of American politicians. The Shah wound up alienating the bazaaris, who also happened to be closely tied to the religious leaders in Iran. The White Revolution provided an opportunity for the clerics to flex their political muscle and mobilize the Iranian people against the Shah. Two significant items became apparent to the clerics; one, they had the ability to mobilize large masses of Iranians for a cause and two, Ruhollah Khomeini became a nationally recognizable figure.

The third major event was the Islamic Revolution itself. The Islamic Revolution is less of an event and more like a crescendo. Over Reza Pahlavi's entire reign as Shah, he perpetuated and fostered a friendly relationship with the United States. The relationship was mutually beneficial; the Shah received economic and military support from the United States and America had a powerful ally in the oil rich Middle East that could act as a spokesman for American interests. The Shah's oppressive actions against

opposition groups when combined with his favorable relationship with the United States automatically made the United States guilty by association in the eyes of Khomeini and his followers.

Since the Islamic Revolution, many of the policies of the United States have been anti-Iran. America provided military and intelligence support to the Iraqis during the eight year long Iran-Iraq War. Kuwaiti oil tankers were re-flagged as American oil tankers in order to protect the flow of oil from the Persian Gulf. The Clinton administration introduced the policy of dual containment and unilateral economic sanctions against Iran. And, most recently, President Bush has given Iran the label of member of the axis of evil. Each of these policies was designed to increase international pressure on the government of Iran to moderate. When they have actually allowed the ruling clerics to tighten their grip and institutionalize the Islamic Revolution.

B. RECOMMENDED FOREIGN POLICY CHANGES

Repealing or modifying the anti-Iranian legislation as a result of negotiations with Iran's Finance minister with the support of Khatami would demonstrate to the Iranian people that the reform movement is able to challenge the United States and win at least marginally. It is important that both the United States and Iran be able to claim victory from negotiations like this because both have strong domestic delegations that have a deep-seeded hatred for the other country. ILSA and the three executive orders pertaining to Iran don't have any significant impact on Iran's economy. The United States cannot unilaterally sanction European and Asian companies that desire to conduct business with Iran without jeopardizing its relationship with their parent countries. The economic interdependence of the United States with the rest of the industrialized world would likely cripple the U.S. economy. Regardless of the potentially negative economic effects for the United States, the sanctions aren't working. Companies from countries that are our friends and allies – Great Britain, Japan and France – have continued to strike oil exploration deals that far exceed the \$20 million trip wire set by the U.S. Congress for sanctions to be enacted. This would be a good first step in showing Iranians that the United States bears no ill will to them. The softening of American foreign policy is also likely to strengthen the liberal regime of the reform movement, which simultaneously weakens the imperial regime of the conservative *mullahs*.

Opening trade relations with Iran will eventually involve Iran in the global economic interdependence that has developed in the past few decades. While it would not be beyond Iran's means to challenge the global system for its own gains, it is doubtful that the people of Iran, after experiencing increased economic success, would support such actions by its government. This argument leans heavily on Keohane and Nye's Complex Interdependence theory, which is not the focus of this thesis, but can be investigated further when making a policy decision in this area.

The United States could provide covert support for newspapers and periodicals that challenge and debate Iran domestic politics. While media such as these already exist in Iran, an additional source of income would be useful in increasing the audience that reads them. One of the most important tools the reformers have is the strength of their argument. Increasing their ability to continually develop their argument and ensure the widest dissemination of it could generate significant internal pressure of the regime to change. Attacks against the United States policies must be allowed in order to maintain an objective appearance from the average Iranian's point of view.

The continuation of publicly supported TV and radio stations in Iran broadcast from the United States provides a destabilizing influence on the conservative clerical regime because it feeds information and propaganda to the Iranian population. This policy goes hand in hand with the covert publication policy discussed above. Ideas, debate and discussion are dangerous for the *mullahs* because the stories of oppression and corruption will become more widely known and more strenuously investigated. There are two potentially positive results: the regime folds and surrenders to the will of the reformers or the regime will undergo an internal reform. One has to question the ability of Iran's government to reform without collapsing.

These are only four possibilities that became apparent during the research process for this thesis. The point is that there are other methods that can be pursued to change the way Iran operates on a daily basis. Everything the United States has done in the past has failed which gives policy makers a good idea of what not to do in the future. There are many people in the United States government and the Middle East think tanks that surround the capital who have a greater understanding of Iran than I do. The most

important change that must occur in America's foreign policy is the paradigm in which Iran's actions are evaluated. Simply slapping an aggressive label like axis of evil is not going to make the Iranian government suddenly realize that they have been wrong all this time and its time they change their ways. It proves the point of the group that America has the biggest problem with, the *mullahs*. It says that America is still pursuing imperial ambitions in Iran and any relaxation of anti-American policies would spell trouble for Iranians.

C. IMPLICATIONS OF CHANGING POLICIES

The relaxation of American foreign policy toward Iran should have the desired effect of allowing the internal political struggle of Iran to develop. The United States has unwittingly aided the *mullahs* with an aggressive policy of international political pressure and unilateral economic sanctions. The removal of these policies leaves the *mullahs* with only their record of economic problems and social unrest. These negatives should give the reformers enough ammunition to attack the current regime and force change in Iran's government.

There are some potential unintended consequences that could result from relaxing American foreign policy towards Iran. The most dangerous is resurgence in Iran's WMD programs. Repealing or modifying ILSA could be seen as a sign of American weakness, which can be exploited for the benefit of the *mullahs*. They could claim responsibility for the actions of the reformers. Since the conservatives control the television and radio in Iran they would be able to prevent the release of any information regarding the agreement until they created a story that benefited their domestic agenda. In this case, the conservatives might be the ones applauded for helping Iran move forward economically and in international politics.

The covert support for periodicals and newspapers may be discovered. This could be disastrous for the American agenda because the immediate response would be images of an imperial foreign power trying to manipulate Iran. There would have to be an elaborate money-laundering scheme that separated the United States government from the actions of these publications.

Regardless of whether the United States plans are discovered or not, the *mullahs* could become suspicious about American intentions just because her policy toward Iran has changed. Twenty-four years is a long time to establish a negative policy toward Iran. If America's policy changed overnight, there would be an immediate reaction inside the United States. AIPAC and the families of hostages taken by Iran would raise an immediate red flag that something was going on. That means that this paradigm and policy shift is something that will probably need to occur over several administrations. This cannot be something that becomes susceptible to typical American partisan politics.

Iranian politics is not moving so fast that American academics, intellectuals and politicians can't devise ways to subvert the Iranian government as it stands today and give the reformers the boost needed to change Iran's government. The most important factor is that the lens the United States uses to view Iran needs to be changed. Too many viable alternatives are overlooked or ignored by American politicians that could solve many of the problems that exist between the United States and Iran. The last thing that America can afford right now is another war.

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